No. 6

The REDEMPTION of Marie Gordon

THE TRAGIC STORY OF
WRONGED WOMANHOOD

Price 10¢

"If she had suddenly been taken away from me by death, I could bow to the inevitable. But," and his voice rose, "it almost kills me to think that she is in the arms of another man."

R. of M. G., No. 6.

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PHILIP GORDON stopped the speaker with a very expressive jesture of his hand. He seemed to resent the implication that he would not sacrifice a night's sleep for his boy. He drew himself up with more dignity than he generally assumed under such circumstances.

"Don't worry on that score," he replied with deadly calmness. "Sleep and I have ceased to be on speaking terms."

Dr. Van Buren knew very well why his friend could not sleep. The gossips had done their work very effectively. As he took his departure, he seized the unhappy man's hand.

"I am sorry for you, Phil," was all he said.

Phil turned away to hide his growing emotion. And when he was alone with the suffering boy, he sat down, buried his face in his hands, and wept.

What he endured that night could not be expressed in mere words. Every time little Harry called for his mother, Phil groaned aloud. If ever a man was being crucified, Philip Gordon was that man.

Morning came, but no sign of improvement in the patient. If anything, he had grown worse.

Dr. Van Buren looked grave as he came and watched the boy for quite a while. When he again suggested, and then insisted, that a trained nurse take charge of the case, the father demurred.

"No," the latter said hoarsely. "No matter what happens, I am going to see it through to the end."

For three days and nights he did not leave the sickroom unless it was absolutely necessary. What little food he ate, was brought to him by one of the servants.

The fourth day the fever broke, and the physician declared the boy out of danger.

"And now," said Dr. Van Buren to Phil, "you

must take care of yourself. Why, you have lost at least ten pounds of weight during the last week. It won't do. You are worrying too much."

"How can I help it?" Gordon groaned. "You don't know what I have gone through. My wife——" he could go no further.

"Yes, I heard about that," the physician said gently. "But you must not let a thing like that kill you, as it surely will if you don't pull yourself together. I can't tell you how terribly shocked I was when I learned the facts. I always regarded Mrs. Gordon as a model wife and mother."

Phil turned away.

"So she was until—until Hoover came between us. Oh," he cried, facing Dr. Van Buren, "you don't know how miserable I am."

"Then you—you still love her?" the other asked almost tenderly.

Gordon bowed his head to conceal the agony written on his face, and threw up a hand in despair.

"God only knows how dearly I love her," he answered slowly. "She was the whole joy of my life. If she had suddenly been taken away from me by death, I could bow to the inevitable. But," and his voice rose, "it almost kills me to think that she is in the arms of another man."

Dr. Van Buren gripped the unhappy man's arm.

"I can imagine that, my friend," he said, real sympathy in his eyes. "But you must bear up under it. Don't forget you have two lovely children. You must fight this thing and win for their sake, for you will have to be father and mother, both, to them.

"And," the man of medicine went on softly, "you must prepare yourself for the shock of seeing your wife again some day. Granted, that she willfully did wrong

—which I refuse to believe—a mother's love for her children is a hard thing to kill. Marie will be drawn back to her babies by a power nothing can resist.

"You must reckon with the possibility of meeting her. It may be in this very room. And when that hour comes, Phil, be merciful to her. Look down into your own heart and make sure that you were not to blame to some extent. Your wife was always high-strung and extremely sensitive. She——"

Philip Gordon drew himself up. His teeth were clenched. It was the fierce expression on his face which made the speaker pause.

"Nothing can condone an act such as my wife committed!" he cried. "She would not dare set her foot in this house again. If she does—if she does," his eyes glinted wickedly. "I won't be responsible for what happens."

Dr. VanBuren was not the man to give up an argument very easily. Especially if he felt that he was in the right.

"My dear boy," he said pleadingly, "I can't tell you how sorry I am that you are taking such a stand in this matter. As I told you before, I refuse to believe that your wife committed a wrong willfully. But whether she did or not, she is entitled to a hearing. It is your solemn duty to give it to her.

"And whatever you do, Phil," he went on in deep earnestness, "don't allow your temper to get the best of you. Remember always that she belongs to the weaker sex. You must be a man in this terrible crisis. You must be just. Look at the situation from every angle before you pass final judgment. Will you do that?"

Gordon inclined his head slightly, but the wicked glint remained in his eyes.

"Yes, I'll give her a chance to come clean," he fin-

ally assented grudgingly. "But I am afraid there are some things my wife can never explain satisfactorily. For instance——"

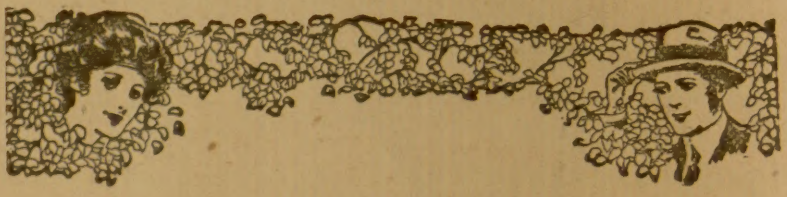
The physician placed a hand on the speaker's shoulder and silenced him.

"In every instance Marie is entitled to the benefit of your doubt," he declared quietly. "Remember that she is the mother of your children. This is still her home and she has every right to enter it."

"She had better not!" Phil flared up.

With an acquiescent nod, Dr. Van Buren indicated that he did not wish to prolong the argument further. He saw how useless it was with Phil in his present state of mind.

When he left the room rather abruptly he did so with a felling of dreadful apprehension. He not only feared for Mrs. Gordon's future, but also for her personal safety.



Chapter 22

LURKING DANGERS

BETTY PROCTER, or rather Betty Harding, had the grit and the independent spirit of all the Procters. And she had determination. She sacrificed her social position, all the luxuries wealth could afford, and practically her whole life, on the altar of love. Of course, she had not expected that her own father would turn against her.

But after he made it plain that her marriage to a poor automobile mechanic made her an outcast so far as the Procter family was concerned, she accepted the edict with characteristic pluck.

Not for a single moment did she regret that she had become Bob Harding's wife. She learned that there were some things in life which could not be bought with money. One of them was the sincere love of an honest man.

Bob Harding proved himself worthy of her love. Yes, he did far more than that. There was no change in him after the first flush of their married happiness was over.

He remained gentle and considerate. There was on his part a constant eagerness to reimburse Betty for the great sacrifice she had made for him.

When young Mrs. Harding promised her husband in that never-to-be-forgotten hour after having been sentenced to spend two years at hard labor, that she would remain loyal to him, she meant every word of it.

A love like hers could not be killed by adversities, however disagreeable they may be.

After all, two years was not such a long time. They would pass quickly, and then she and Bob would begin all over again. The first thing Betty did, was to take stock of herself and her capabilities.

Nothing was further from her mind than the idea of making another appeal to her father for financial help. She was young and strong, and she was thoroughly determined to fight her way alone.

Beside her exceptional personal attractions, she could boast of no particular accomplishment.

She was a good musician. She spoke English, German and French almost equally well. Her college education had given her no other advantages, however.

The idea of teaching piano for a living she discarded at once. It could not be attempted without an established reputation.

What she longed for was a position in some large commercial house which would guarantee her a steady and comfortable income. But what qualifications had she? She was good at figures, and wrote a fine hand.

She knew, though, that female clerks were underpaid. She had unusual talent for drawing. She could do wonders with pen and ink. And Betty, after long consideration, decided to make use of that talent.

All department stores in large cities had art departments and advertising departments.

Detroit, not far away, boasted of several big retail commercial houses. As soon as this idea was settled in her mind, she acted upon it. Two days later found her in Detroit.

But she felt poignantly alone in that city, which had taken no thought of her existence, which seemed to turn away indifferently from her approach. But she had no intention of givng up.

She had to fight for Bob's sake, and for that little

human being she carried under her heart.

Bety figured that she would be able to work f at least six or seven months before making preparation to welcome the little visitor who would come to stay.

One morning she stood at the curb of a down-town business section. She had a slip of paper in her hand on which the name of a large department store was written.

Within a few hours she hoped to have the coveted position. She stepped from the curb with that impulse warm in her young body.

She disregarded, in her hurry, the first line of automobiles that shuttled past her. Then she stopped, in a momentary panic, before the second line bearing down upon her.

As she hesitated she caught sight of the huge traffic officer in the center of the street.

Betty was not conscious of calling out to him. But he must have either seen or heard her, for with an imperious lift of his white-gloved hand he brought the second line of cars to a halt.

She had not intended to fling herself into his arms. But safety, she knew, lay in the shadow of that sheltering blue figure.

The officer smiled down at her approvingly as he drew her into neutral territory and motioned for the momentarily halted procession of cars to proceed.

"You'll have to step careful in a town like this," he admonished Betty.

"I know,' she admitted as she crowded close to him. 'But I took a chance."

"Don't take chances, girlie," was his friendly advice as he piloted her across to the other side of the street. "It would be a shame if you got hurt. Let them kill the ugly ones."

Betty rewarded him with a smile of silent gratitude.

She felt that there was always someone to help you if you were honest and frank about everything. There was something about men that made them considerate if you were considerate with them.

Her heart lightened as she approached the big Haddon Department Store. She went at once to the fifth floor to see the employment manager. She was received with a nod and a smile.

"So you are looking for a position?" this sharp-featured individual said with an appraising grin. "Well, fill out this blank."

He drew a rather large sheet of paper from one of the drawers and placed it before Betty. She glanced at it, then blushed as she caught the man eyeing her like if she were some curio.

"I am afraid I don't know how to do this," she murmured.

"No?" He was comtemplating her lovely face. "Then supposing I do it for you," he suggested.

"Would you?" she breathed in tremulous gratitude.

He did not answer. But his fountain pen began moving rapidly over the application blank, making out the date, etc.

"What is your name?" he asked suddenly.

Betty did not reply at once. Would it be wise to say that she was a married woman? Perhaps not, but she dreaded the telling of a deliberate falsehood.

"Mrs. Betty Harding," she said.

The man gave her a sharp glance.

"Your husband dead?" he inquired with a peculiar smile.

"No, sir." Betty flushed hotly.

She felt that she was responsible for the terrible thing that had happened. Ah, how she regretted having brought Phil within vision of that scene in the pavilion.

An uncomfortable space of silence followed. She was not the first young married woman who had been compelled to work. But this one was exceptionably good-looking. It seemed a pity that she must soil those slender white hands. So thought the employment manager.

"How old are you?" was his next question.

"Nineteen."

"Nineteen? Good lord, so young and married?"

The remark was passed over by Betty. It was her anger that gave her the need courage to go on.

She met the interrogator's protracted gaze, her eyes flashing. And she looked positively beautiful in her wrath.

"Have you any references, Mrs. Harding?" the man asked.

"None, except my college papers," she retorted. "I am a graduate of Vassar."

Another space of silence. This young applicant was obviously educated and refined. But it was not very often that a young woman graduate from a college like Vassar came to this department store to apply for work.

"What did you come to Detroit for?" the employment manager inquired, very much interested.

"To get a position, of course," she answered. "I have a gift for drawing."

"But this is a department store."

"I know, sir. I was hoping there'd be something in your art department I could do."

"You mean our advertising department," he corrected. "We use artists here, but they are all trained men."

Betty was disappointed.

"Then you have nothing for me at all?" she said, her lips quivering.

He met her note of forlornness with a prolonging

quiet smile that established an undefined something between them. She could not have explained why, but she knew that this man was on her side, that he was ready to help her.

"Oh, yes, I have," he said with a paternal hand on her arm. "I can give you a very good position at one of our basement counters."

"What would I have to do there?" she asked after he had spoken briefly over the phone and restored the receiver to its hook.

"To begin with, you'd sell marked-down goods. That is our bargain-counter department. You'll have to act as stock girl at first, and have instruction in the classroom three mornings a week, on selling, making out sales slips and all that sort of thing."

"Would I have to stay long with — with the marked down goods?" Betty asked, a quaver of disappointment in her voice. If she leaned closer to the man, she seemed unconscious of the movement.

"I don't think you're the kind of a girl who'd have to," he said, as his appraising eyes swept her slender, but well formed body. Then he added as he saw the flush stain her face: 'You're the type of a girl that want's to get on. I can see that. And a girl advances, my dear, precisely as she is willing to please people."

If there was any deeper meaning to this speech, Betty preferred to ignore it.

"Indeed, I want to get on," she answered bravely, although the man had become faintly repugnant to her. "And—and it is good of you to help me, sir."

"It is nice to know that I can continue to help you," he observed in a tone of gallantry, and an emphasized smile that did not make Betty particularly happy.

She sat with downcast eyes, conscious of his discomforting close scrutiny. She was averse to being bold,

but on the other hand she was even more averse to antagonizing him. The eyes that rested on the six inches of exposed silk hosiery grew suddenly impersonal.

"Well, if you are going to be one of us," the employment manager announced, "you may as well meet your floor superior. He'll give you your number and place, and explain things in general. And there is only one more thing I would like to say to you, my dear Mrs. Harding.

"If you play your cards right," he went on significantly, "I'll see to it that you are transferred to the advertising department within a few months. As I told you before, a girl advances as she is willing to please people."

With that he touched a bell, and a slim woman rather past her youth, came into the office.

"Miss Steiner," said the employment manager, "take this young lady down to Mr. Massey."

Betty followed the woman.

When they reached the elevator, Miss Steiner whispered: "You made a hit with the main top, for he is shooting you straight to counter work. You'll find out that he is a good man to have for a friend."

"But—but I thought he was only the man who does the employing," Betty answered.

"He does that for pastime," Miss Steiner observed with a peculiar grin. "But he is one of the biggest stock holders in the firm. He's got more money than Rockefeller, and it'll pay you to have him for a friend."

Betty said nothing.

While she was glad that she found a man of such influence who took an interest in her, she decided to keep her eyes wide open in the future.

She did not mean to be under any obligations she could not discharge honorably.

All preliminary arrangements were made in a little while. Betty was told to come to work the next morning.

By the time she reached the street, she was in a rather good mood. The world was not such a bad place to live in. She had a position now, and the prospects were splendid. The salary was in excess of what she had hoped for.

As soon as she reached her room on that little side street, she intended to write her husband and tell him of her good fortune.

A week of the two years of waiting for Bob had already passed. She found that she was far more optimistic than she expected to be.

Again she stood at the curb, blinking at the long line of automobiles that filed past her. They moved and paused and moved again, directed by the solemn blue figure with a whistle in his hand.

Then suddenly someone jostled her slightly.

"I beg your pardon," coolly observed a tall, tired-looking stranger close to her elbow. And he laughed a little, even as she swept him with her icy stare of aversion. "I really couldn't help it," he explained, still unruffled. "You make me think of a fresh-hatched robin taking its first look over the nest rim at the world."

"You are not making the world any more attractive to me," Betty said with all the scorn at her command.

"But you have for me, dearie," the man observed as he turned and sauntered on beside her. "And, please, don't be offended, young lady. I do not, as a rule, speak to girls unknown to me. You are such a perfect type of a certain beauty, that I could not resist it."

Betty gave him a withering glance.

"Save your compliments for your wife," she said.

"I have none," was the quick rejoinder, then fol-

lowed a laugh. "I never was fortunate enough to make any girl believe that she ought to marry me. But you—you, would you mind telling me who you are?"

"I am a shopgirl at Haddon's department store," she flung back at him.

"Are you?" The man looked surprised. "Why, I would never have thought that. You are more like the picture I saw on the front cover of a late magazine. And by the way," he went on good-naturedly, "I am Carlton McLain. Of course, that means nothing to you. But if you happen to run across an especially bad novel on one of the news stands, it's very likely to be mine."

"If it is as bad as your manners, I don't think I would be interested," was her spirited retort.

"Well, I like that," the man proclaimed. "And I like you. You'll probably doubt it, but I don't do this sort of thing as a rule. Really, I had no intention of offering you an insult. I may be a bit eccentric, but I am not a rounder."

Chapter 23

THE ARTIST

BETTY HARDING glanced sharply at the man who claimed to be a writer of fiction. No, he did not have the appearance of a man who would deliberately accost any pretty young girl on the street. His voice betrayed culture, and his manners were not really bad in spite of the fact that he insistently walked beside her.

He was obviously a gentleman. He wore the best tailor-made clothes. He wore spats, and from his breast pocket dangled a silk cord, at the end of which probable was fastened a monocle.

"You know," he spoke again, "when I see a face like yours, I can't help but think of an intimate friend of mine. He is an artist and draws cover designs for magazines. I dare say if he saw you, he would carry you off to his studio at once."

"Would he?" Betty could not help smiling.

"Indeed he would, Miss—won't you tell me your name?"

"My name could not interest you, for we shall never meet again."

"Oh, yes, we will."

It was as he uttered those few words that Betty caught a peculiar glint in the man's eyes. It gave her a sudden fright. And yet she found it hard to hate him as she ought.

She turned her back on him almost against her will, and ran as fast as she could. In less than a minute she was lost in the crowd.

By the time Betty reached her lodging, she had regained her composure.

Of course, she could not help thinking of the man and his strange conduct. As she raked the chambers of her memory, she discovered that he was not entirely unknown to her.

She had read several stories by Carlton McLain. And they had been wonderful stories, too.

Her mind began to be vaguely disturbed when she recalled that she had told him that she was employed at the Haddon Department Store. If he was as persistent as he looked, he would leave no stone unturned to find her there.

Still, the fact that he was a novelist of national reputation, made such a possibility less unpleasant.

Betty Harding's first week at the department store was a series of impressions that seemed to obliterate one another like wave marks on shore sand.

She resented being known as Miss Fifty-Seven, just as she resented being associated with the sale of marked-down merchandise.

She nursed a distaste for rearranging soiled lingerie tossed about by pushing and impatient women shoppers. She disliked the dark store uniform she was compelled to wear.

She disliked the noisy talk in the cafeteria where she ate her noon lunch. She disliked the matron whose keen eyes watched over all the girls employed in the big store. She resented being told that a young lady, nowadays, is taken at her own rating

She resented being reminded that accepted favors from men usually had a string attached to them.

Her many dislikes and resentments were but natural, however, for Betty was so utterly unlike the other female employes. She had been reared amid luxury.

She had been pampered and spoiled by the great wealth of an over-indulgent father.

Not that she regretted having taken the position. Not for a moment. Betty knew that she must work for a living, and being a saleswoman was merely the stepping stone to something better.

The girls she met were all of the free and easy sort. They carried their own latchkeys and had their own ideas of right and wrong. If men liked you, there was no law against letting them show it.

Betty had two ardent admirers in the store. One of them was the employment manager, a member of the firm, who came every day to inquire how she was getting along.

Another was the floorman in charge of the section in which she worked. She liked neither of the two.

Massey, the floorman, seemed to take delight in showing her how to make out sales slips. And when he did this, he always leaned unnecessarily close. But she betrayed no annoyance.

"Stand in with Massey, and the rest will come easy," one of the girls told her.

So Betty was able to smile up at that man as he picked a thread from her shoulder. And she condoned his playful tap of disapproval when she made a mistake in her sales slip.

She endured his casual handclasp about her arm as he directed her gaze to the shelf supply from which she was to replenish her stock.

By and by Betty became more and more used to the idea that she had to make her own way in the world until her husband was released from prison. But she had no intention of cheapening herself.

She was lenient with Mr. Massey because she did not want to offend him. But there were limits beyond

which this dapper floorman would not be permitted to venture.

The one thing she priced highly, was her absolute independence. The one promise she made to her husband she intended to keep religiously. When he came back, he wanted to find her unsoiled.

When Mr. Massey asked her, during one of the midday lulls, if she ever went to the movies, she answered in the affirmative.

"There is a good film at the Metropolitan," he told her hopefully. "If it's alright with you, we'll see it tonight."

Betty shook her pretty head.

"I don't think it would be proper, Mr. Massey," she retorted. "You see, I have a husband, and——"

"You, a husband?" he laughed incredulously. "Why, you are just a kid."

"Thanks for the compliment, but I have a husband just the same."

The floorman's features expressed a sneer.

"Some husband," he said in an undertone, "to let a lovely little wife like you work in a department store."

Her face flushed scarlet at this, and her eyes flashed.

"Don't you think you are going a little too far?" she demanded, her voice cold as the north wind. "I want you to know that my husband is a man, and not a dressed up male mannikin like you. If he heard you say what you said a moment ago, he'd break you in half."

Mr. Massey found it convenient to give his attention to a group of approaching customers at this juncture.

It was perhaps fifteen minutes later that Betty realized that she was being studied by a serious faced man rather past his youth.

"Save your compliments for your wife," she said.
"I have none," was the quick rejoinder. "I was never fortunate enough to make any girl believe that she ought to marry me."

There was distinction in his very carelessness, in the careless forward thrust of his shoulders, in the careless swing of his cane and the gloves portruding from his pocket.

Her pulse quickened perceptibly as he advanced somewhat diffidently toward the counter. Yet, she preferred to ignore his presence as he came to a stop before her array of shop-soiled finery.

When Betty looked up finally, she met his gaze coolly.

"Anything for you, sir?" she asked in her naturally melodious voice.

"Yes," he replied hastily. "I should like this one," denoting with the end of his cane a near-by garment of salmon pink. His color, for some reason, had deepened a little.

"Five ninety-eight," Betty announced as she reached for the designated garment of frilled silk. "Do you want to take it with you, or will you have it sent?"

She watched him as he reached abstractedly into his breast pocket for a bill fold.

But instead of opening the fold and extracting the money, he continued to study Betty's face, and particularly her luminous eyes and fair white throat.

"You—you are wonderful," he exclaimed in a low voice.

"I beg your pardon," she retorted.

"No, it is I who ought to be making apologies," the man murmured. "I do not annoy saleswomen in this manner as a rule. Really, I don't. But I am an artist, you see. I have a weakness for form and color. When I see a face like yours, I—I, well, I forget myself."

"What is wrong with my face?" Betty demanded indignantly.

"Good heavens, there is nothing wrong with it,"

exclaimed the artist. "The only thing is that it seems to be out of place."

"Where would you like to see it?" was her none too concilliatory inquiry.

"On canvass," was the other's prompt reply. "Pardon my asking, but have you ever posed?"

"How dare you ask me a thing like that?" she cried, her sweet face turning white, then crimson. "I want you to know that I am——"

"Of course you are," cut in the startled artist. "I know you are a nice decent sort of a girl. I saw it at a glance. That is your charm. But you misunderstood me—you jumped at the wrong conclusion when I asked you if you ever posed. I did not mean posing in the—in the, well, you know what I mean. I meant posing in some sort of a fancy costume for magazine covers and the like."

Betty Harding instantly surmised that this man had been sent to seek her by Carlton McLain, the novelist. She recalled that the latter had mentioned having an intimate friend who was an artist.

Her mental attitude underwent a change. Obviously this artist was a gentleman. She had made a mistake and perhaps was overlooking the one great chance. Her eyes softened.

"I am somewhat of an artist myself," she admitted and blushed charmingly. "At least, I aspire to be one."

"What can you do?" he asked.

Instead of answering, Betty took up her pencil and sales book, and on blank paper drew an excellent likeness of the floorman who stood a short distance away. It was really a fine portrait.

With a smile she handed it across the counter.

"That is clever," commented the artist as he gazed

at it. "Yes, quite clever. I wish I could show you some of my work. But it is all at my studio. I don't suppose you'd care to drop in there some day?"

"I am not in the habit of dropping in at a stranger's studio," she reminded him.

"Of course, you are not," he agreed. "But I was wondering if we could not make it a sort of a business meeting. I'd give a great deal to have the privilege of painting your face. And I might be able to help you make your ambition to become a real artist come true. I am really not a bad instructor."

Betty consumed quite a little time in silent reflection of the matter. She heartily disliked her present work. It seemed almost unendurable now—since her chat with this artist.

She could not afford to turn down an opportunity such as had been offered her now.

The artist appealed to her. No doubt he could put her in a position to earn vastly more than the work of a saleswoman paid her. It did not take her long to arrive at a conclusion.

"You are unusually kind," she said, her voice quivering a trifle. "But I do not even know your name and address. How could I find your studio if I wanted to come?"

He laughed softly and produced a neatly engraved card.

"Here it is. The studio is not hard to find. My name—I mean my christian name, I am not responsible for. It was chosen for me by my mother who sought to perpetuate her maiden name. Waterford sounds silly, doesn't it?"

"Waterford Burley," Betty read, then added aloud: "Why no, I think it is a very nice name. It sounds so distinguished."

"But I often wish my mother had called me John,

Tom or Bob," the artist said regretfully. "My friends call me Wat for short. Some call me Water, although I have not much use for that fluid except for bathing purposes."

Both laughed at this. Betty was reflecting again.

"Sunday is my only free day," she acknowledged. "But I'll come only on the condition that a third person be present when I call. That person must be a woman—a lady."

"I am never alone," he told her. "You see, my only sister lives with me. So you will be quite safe and properly chaperoned."

Betty's thoughtful eyes studied his face. There was an air of honesty about it that she liked. And he could help her so much. She was anxious to increase her income and save a few hundred dollars to give to her husband when he came back. There was no hesitation in her voice when she spoke.

"Alright, I'll come next Sunday," she announced.

"Splendid!" the artist cried, and Betty discovered that he was shaking hands with her.

Her embarrassment increased as he continued to hold her hand, while his intent eyes continued their study of her face.

She was still smiling over the discovery that Waterford Burley had left without taking his parcel or his change. And then she saw Mr. Massey, the floorman standing close beside her.

His eyes were dark with resentment as he stared after the departing figure with the cane crooked over one elbow.

"You seem to be starting well," he said with a note of bitterness.

"What do you mean?" she flared back.

"Carrying on flirtations with male customers. I

suppose you made a date with him, didn't you? The fact that you already have a husband does not count in this case. But you better watch your step, young lady. I don't like you any better for the throw-down you gave me. The chances are that you won't find this such a pleasant place to work in."

Betty gave the speaker a long glance of withering contempt.

"Whenever this store becomes disagreeable, I shall leave quickly enough," she retorted icily, and turned her back to Mr. Massey.

"You are apt to leave it sooner than you expect, and under conditions not at all to your liking," he flung after her. "Please remember that."

Chapter 24

THE RETURN

IT WAS INDEED an evil hour for Marie Gordon, when the man whom she hoped never to see again, was so unexpectedly thrown across her path. Of course, she was very anxious to be rid of him, but when she did, incalculable harm had been done. Tom Atkinson, a friend of the family, saw her and Jack Hoover together on the train, jumped at the wrong conclusion, and unwittingly laid the foundation for a domestic tragedy.

Had he taken the trouble to keep Mrs. Gordon and Hoover in sight after leaving the train in the Grand Central Station at Cincinnati, he would have witnessed a scene that gave the lie to his hastily formed conclusion.

Had he been within earshot, he would have heard Marie's voice in shrill protest when Jack Hoover insisted upon remaining in her company.

Atkinson would have been brought to the realization that the meeting between these two was purely accidental, and the fateful telegram would never have been sent.

The inclination to place the worst possible construction upon the action of others, is a most deplorable human weakness.

We see a sinister motive where none exists. We take snap judgment without examination and thus often create misery and heartaches.

Tom Atkinson had done that very thing. But the incident involving Marie Gordon and Jack Hoover was all the more deplorable because it was bound to affect

two innocent little children.

Atkinson placed the stamp of infamy upon their mother by sending a message that should never have reached an already jealous husband.

After Marie had sent Hoover away, she boarded a taxi which was to take her to the home of her aunt in Walnut Hills, an exclusive suburb of Cincinnati. She experienced a sense of relief at being alone at last.

But a feeling of vague uneasiness crept in. It must have been some sort of a premonition which made her regret so keenly having met Hoover on the train. While he had conducted himself faultlessly, instinct told her that the least encouragement would bring on a declaration of love.

Marie placed a great deal of hope on the meeting with her aunt. If any living person could help her, it was this astute and keen-visaged maiden lady.

As the taxi stopped in the front of a rather pretentious residence, Mrs. Gordon got out quickly and paid the driver.

"Do you want me to wait?" the latter inquired respectfully.

"No, you needn't," Marie answered with a little smile.

She approached the front entrance briskly and rang the bell.

Her expectation of seeing her aunt open the door proved a disappointment. A servant of apparent middle age appeared. She was a tall, angular person with a hatchet face and narrow eyes.

"Miss Carey is not at home," she broke in disagreeably before Marie had finished speaking.

"Oh, isn't she?" the latter said with a catch in her voice.

"No, she left for California three days ago and

won't be back for three months," came back sourly.

Marie Gordon stood irresolute. Her disappointment grew bitter.

What was she to do now? She had not visited her aunt for a number of years, and consequently she was a total stranger to the servant. Suddenly she became conscious that she was being regarded with suspicion.

And before she knew it, the door was slammed in her face. Her cheeks flushed hotly. The impudence of that woman!

For a long moment she debated with herself. She was obviously not welcome. And the servants would not believe her if she told them that she was Miss Carey's niece from Chicago. She turned away in disgust.

There was but one thing to do under the circumstances. She decided to return home on the very next train.

Trudging wearily back to the street, she regretted having dismissed the taxi. Her mother heart was listening to the silent call of her children, and she was anxious to be on the way.

Glancing at her wrist watch, she noticed that she would have plenty of time if she took the street car.

She saw one approaching, city-bound, and stepped off the curb to hail it.

Marie did not know that she was in danger until she heard the screech of hastily applied automobile brakes.

The next instant she felt a stinging pain in her right side, then black unconsciousness came over her.

A crowd collected quickly. The driver of the machine which had struck her, was first to reach the prostate figure. He was very pale and excited.

"Help me put her in my car," he cried to several

close bystanders. "I'll take her to the hospital as fast as I can."

This was done before a police officer arrived.

The trip to the city hospital was made in record time. The still unconscious woman was laid on a couch in the receiving ward, and a physician at once examined her.

"I don't think there are any bones broken," he remarked.

It was the sound of his voice so close to her ears which seemed to arouse Marie. She sat up and stared about wildly.

"Oh, what happened to me?" she gasped.

The physician told her.

"The gentleman whose car injured you left his name and address," he went on to explain. "He was very sorry the accident happened, and he hopes that you will not bring suit without giving him——"

"Bring suit?" Marie echoed. "Why, I wouldn't think of such a thing. Besides, I was as much to blame as he when I stepped off the curb without looking. And I am not hurt much. I am alright. Please, let me go."

The physician shook his head. He had been much impressed by the young woman's unusual beauty as well as her evident air of refinement.

"I suggest that you remain with us at least for twenty-four hours," he said gravely. "We want to be quite sure that you are not internally hurt. Sometimes injuries that seem trivial at first, develop into bad cases. We will communicate with your relatives."

Marie colored. The idea of having Philip informed about her accident did not appeal to her.

"Please do not trouble," she replied. "I am not hurt. Really, I am not. I must leave for home without delay." As she struggled to her feet she discovered that

her right leg felt paralyzed. "Oh, I can't walk," she wailed with an agonized look on her face.

"There is only one thing you can do," the doctor told her very gently. "You will have to stay until you are able to walk. A few days' complete rest will fix you up."

She yielded, distressed at the prospect of being indefinitely detained.

Marie was put in a private ward, but steadfastly refused to give her name and address. And so the day passed, then another. A week rolled around before any real improvement came.

At last she was discharged, and then she left for Chicago in a state of feverish excitement.

During her confinement at the hospital she had had ample time for reflection. She gained a different view point concerning her domestic difficulties. She had begun to wonder if she and Phil could not start all over. But he must agree never to flirt with Alice Procter again.

But it was when she thought of her two babies that emotion gripped her. Ah, how she had missed them. Her heart ached fiercely to hold them close to her breast.

Upon her arrival in Chicago, she engaged a taxi and drove to Oak Manor. The trip seemed frightfully long, and the closer she came to the wonderful summer home, the more she realized what a fool she had been. She found herself growing happy and excited.

Twilight had begun to gather as she reached her destination at last. There was no one on the grounds to see her pay and dismiss the taxi. She did not enter by the front door, but chose the side entrance.

With her heart beating wildly, she ran up the stairs. In the corridor on the second floor she heard the voices of the children in the nursery. Annie was romp-

ing with them. She was about to rush in, when a door on the other side opened, and her husband stepped out.

For a moment they stood face to face in dramatic silence.

The most tragic moment in Marie Gordon's life had come when she stood face to face with her husband in the corridor. With breathless suspense she waited for him to speak. She saw the peculiar gleam in his eyes and gave an involuntary shudder. Instinctively she raised her hands as if to ward off a blow. The move brought a sneer to Philip's lips.

"I am not going to strike you," he said in a voice Marie scarcely recognized. "I don't want to soil my hands."

Marie's pallor quickly gave way to an indignant flush. What did he mean? Disdaining to press him for an explanation or even making any sort of an answer, she turned to enter the nursery.

In a flash Philip was at her side.

"Don't go in there!" he hissed. "You wouldn't dare!"

With that he took a fierce grip on Marie's arm and forced her across the corridor through an open door which led to his room. She watched him with blank amazement as he turned the key in the lock.

"Now then," he muttered, confronting her, "we can talk without the children hearing it."

Marie was still utterly in the dark as to the reason for her husband's all too evident anger. What right had he to play the injured one when he himself was responsible for her leaving home.

"Why, Phil," she said, trying vainly to keep her voice under control. "What is the matter? I did not come back to quarrel with you. I merely wanted to see my babies. Surely I have a right to——"

He silenced her with a gesture of protest.

Continued in next number

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